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Report

The Educational Attainment Process in the Soviet Union: A Case Study

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Since the death of Stalin, the USSR has adopted numerous programs to expand educational opportunity. Currently, Soviet policy aims at insuring that all youth complete at least a secondary education. It also provides tuition-free schooling at all levels and stipends for more than 70 percent of full-time students in institutions of higher or special secondary education. It even requires that certain schools maintain "preparatory faculties" to give remedial instruction to some applicants from disadvantaged groups or regions who would otherwise fail to meet admission standards. The Soviet regime is quick to emphasize its accomplishments in providing educational opportunity. As the educational act of 1973 puts it: "In our country, for the first time in the history of mankind, a genuinely democratic system of public education has been established."[1]

However, the exigencies of the Soviet economy impose limits on educational opportunity. Soviet planners place singular emphasis on schools as producers of skilled workers and "specialists." Each of the USSR's 4,300 special secondary schools (technicums) provides training for a narrow range of clearly defined occupations; the same applies to more than 90 percent of the 850-odd institutions of higher education (*vysshee uchebnoe zavedenie*; the common Russian acronym is *VUZ* or, in the plural, *VUZy*). Even the 63 universities require that applicants compete for positions available within their chosen discipline. Moreover, full-time students both in technicums and in *VUZy* are guaranteed employment in their speciality upon graduation; in fact, they are required to accept employment where assigned for 3 years. Since the availability of skilled occupations falls considerably short of demand (as in other industrial countries), this effort to coordinate the supply of students with the demand for specialists imposes a ceiling on educational opportunity.

Furthermore, though official ideologists assert that the USSR is moving steadily toward an egalitarian communist society, Soviet scholars frankly acknowledge—and their social research clearly demonstrates—that structured social inequality continues to exist. City is separated from village by a glaring gap in standard of living and in cultural level, and the populace continues to be highly differentiated according to income, occupational prestige, authority, access to decision making, and other indi-

[1] *Osnovy zakonodatel'stva soiuza SSR o narodnom obrazovanii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Izvestiia Sovetov Deputatov Trudiashchikhsia SSSR, 1973), p. 1.

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